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ABSTRACT

The speech communication department at California State University, Northridge, offers a course entitled, "Rhetoric of Women," that combines a traditional rhetorical criticism approach with recent women's studies research. The course is organized topically, moving from the general to a more specific examination of variables that operate in the rhetorical situation. Students begin by examining a sample analysis of Barbara Jordan's speech to the Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives. Additionally they read analysis of other women's speeches. Sex roles and sex role stereotypes serve as a basis for understanding audience expectations of women speakers. The next units concern rhetoric from a feminist perspective and three aspects of the rhetorical act: credibility, language, and nonverbal communication. The units that follow focus on women's use of language and its effect on women and women's nonverbal behavior. By the end of the course, students have read materials from a number of sources and disciplines and are able to synthesize the research about women as it relates to women speakers. They have also viewed and criticized videotapes of women speakers. (MKM)

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# COMMUNICATION AND THE SEXES: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

## A Rhetorical Perspective

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## Introduction

One of the pleasures of teaching Speech Communication is that its eclecticsm appears unbounded. No matter what the subject of discussion may be, we in Speech Communication are "at home" because the topic must be conveyed to listeners through that process we are dedicated to -- rhetoric. As Speech Communication teachers, we have always been comfortable incorporating theories and concepts from other disciplines in order to gain a broad perspective of the rhetorical process which we study. Some of us have been incorporating a relatively new interdisciplinary field, Women Studies. We have found this field offers rhetorical critics new insights into the rhetorical act, particularly into the rhetorical situation women encounter when speaking in public.

Speech Communication was one of the first academic disciplines in which courses related to women were developed. In the March, 1974, issue of The Speech Teacher, Wil A. Linkugel published an article, "The Rhetoric of American Feminism: A Social Movement Course," outlining a syllabus for a course in Rhetoric of American Feminism.[1] Since that time, several articles have been published in Speech Communication journals discussing the relationship of recent research about

women to Speech Communication course content.[2] Many of the Women Studies courses in Speech Communication departments focus on interpersonal communication, and though rhetorical critics recently have paid a little more attention to women speakers than in the past, there is a need for courses which examine and criticize, in depth, women speakers and how their sex affects the rhetoric they use.

The Speech Communication department at California State University, Northridge, offers a course entitled, "Rhetoric of Women," which combines a traditional rhetorical criticism approach with recent Women Studies research. It is an upper division course, with no prerequisites, although many students have some background in rhetorical criticism or in Women Studies.

An examination of the goals of the course, and a description of materials used, suggest the desirability of developing courses which synthesize rhetorical criticism and women studies.

GOALS

The goals of the course are as follows:

> To determine what kinds of rhetorical problems women face when speaking in public.

To analyze rhetorical strategies used by women speakers.

To raise questions about traditional rhetorical analysis.

To examine characteristics of female rhetoric.

To synthesize research from a variety of fields so as to better understand and evaluate the effects of women's rhetoric.

TOPICS AND MATERIALS

The course is organized topically rather than chronologically, moving from the general (i.e., approaches to rhetorical criticism and rhetoric of movements) to a more specific examination of variables which operate in the rhetorical stiuation. Students begin by examining the sample analysis of Barbara Jordan's speech to the House Judiciary Committee as found in Craig Smith's, Orientation to Speech Criticism.[3] They also read the Linkugel article, "The Women Suffrage Argument of Anna Howard Shaw,"[4] for an example of a traditional rhetorical criticism. Additionally, they examine an article Chrysalis which illustrates a feminist analysis at a rhetorical event.[5]

Sex roles and sex role sterotypes serve as a basis for understanding audience expectations of women speakers, one of the many problems women speakers encounter. The course relates research in

sex role sterotypes to the female speaker and clearly points up one of the overriding problems women speakers have. Students read articles by the Roszaks, Densmore, and Weisstein.[6] The last two authors not only discuss sex roles and sex role stereotypes but the articles themselves are examples of radical feminist rhetoric. A speech by Shirly Chisholm[7] and an article about Helen Gahagan Douglas[8] help students see the implications of sex role stereotypes on female speakers.

Rhetoric from a feminist perspective is the next unit, and articles by Hancock and Campbell give students a background for a feminist view of rhetorical criticism.[9] Ti-Grace Atkinson's Catholic University speech is an excellent example of Campbell's theory in action and always provokes discussion,[10] as does Sally Kempton's essay, "Cutting Loose," and Robin Morgan's "Goodby to all That."[11] This section, Rhetoric from a Feminist Perspective, motivates students to raise questions about traditional rhetorical analysis and to bring up questions they think should be asked about female speakers.

Students next focus on three aspects of rhetorical act: credibility, language, and nonverbal communication. They read articles and

speeches which provide theoretical and practical analysis of credibility and women speakers. The discussion of credibility inevitably leads to a discussion of power and powerlessness and students begin to see the relationship of sex roles, power, and rhetoric.

Women's use of language and its effect on them is the next unit in the course. Again, language relates to all the previously discussed research and readings. An example of an unusual use of language is a speech given by Rita Mae Brown at the Women's Building in Los Angeles and transcribed for the students so that they can both hear and read the speech, helping them see the impact of delivery on the message.

Women's nonverbal behavior is the last unit covered in the course. Research from Speech Communication and Women Studies is presented and related to women's use of nonverbal communication in the public speaking situation.[12]

By the end of the course, students have read materials from a number of sources and disciplines and are able to synthesize the research about women as it relates to women speakers. They see, for example, how language can perpetuate sex role stereotypes and how the effectiveness of women's

rhetoric will be influenced by their language. The goals of the course, as stated earlier, are accomplished by providing students with an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis and criticism of women's rhetoric.

ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to varied reading assignments from journals of Speech Communication, and Women Studies, students write two papers and take a final examination. The purpose of the first paper is to discuss one of the following concepts as it relates to women speakers: roles, stereotypes, credibility, language, nonverbal communication. By focusing on one aspect of the rhetorical act, and reading scholarly research, students gain a clearer understanding of the problems women face when speaking in public. Students share their papers in class and learn from each other's presentations. The second paper, a lengthy research paper, synthesizes concepts of rhetorical analysis and applies these to a particular female speaker. Students are urged to hear speakers and to tape and transcribe the speeches. They have been able to hear and criticize Bella Abzug, Dr. Helen Caldicott, Rita Mae Brown, Eleanor Smeal, and Mary Daly. The final examination is based on a series of study questions which ask

students to synthesize all the materials read and discussed during the semester.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of advantages to teaching a course such as this. The course is highly relevant to the interests of students. Those with background in rhetorical criticism can expand their perspectives of the rhetorical act. Those with little or no background become knowledgeable about rhetoric and how it affects as well is effected by society. Students find the course interesting because it provides valuable information for their everyday lives. Though not an intended goal of the course, many of the women students find they become much more aware and confident when speaking before a group because of their knowledge of the specific relationship between their sex and the rhetorical situation. The course not only shows the relationship of rhetoric to the real world but by integrating research from women studies, it shows the close relationship of rhetoric to other academic disciplines.

Probably the major disadvantage of the course is the lack of available published speeches and the lack of speeches by women available on tape. One new source, however, is an excellent set of speeches by contemporary speakers on feminist issues. Entitled, "The Women's

Movement: Forum on the Future," these seven videotapes include speeches by Ti-Grace Atkinson, Flo Kennedy, and Gloria Steinem.[13] In addition, I have collected a number of speeches from students who have transcribed speeches they heard. However, it is evident that women's speeches are still not reported to the extent that men's speeches are. A quick survey of Vital Speeches reveals that of twenty-one issues reporting approximately 190 speeches, four were by women.

This course, Rhetoric of Women, gives students an understanding of the rhetorical act in which women participate. With women taking part in more and more aspects of public and corporate life, the relevance of the rhetoric of women will increase. Also, with the increased publication of research about women, new insights into the rhetoric of women will emerge. A course which deals with rhetoric and women is essential to Speech Communication departments.

## Footnotes

1. Vol. 23, (March, 1974), 121-130.

2. See, for example, Sandra Purnell, "Sex Roles in Communication Teaching and Research," Western Speech, 40 (Spring, 1976), 111-120; F. L. Johnson and L. Goldman, "Communication Education for Women: A Case for Separatism," Communication Education, 26 (November, 1977), 319-26; Cynthia Berryman, "Instructional Materials for Teaching a Course in Women and Communication," Communication Education, 28 (July, 1979) 217-224.

3. Science Research Associates, 1976.

4. Wil A. Linkugel, "The Women Suffrage Argument of Anna Howard Shaw, Quarterly Journal of Speech, 47 (April, 1963), 165-174.

5. Kathy Barry, "Beyond the Backlash: The Politics and Vision of Susan B. Anthony," Chrysalis, 5 pp. 11-19.

6. Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak, Masculine/ Feminine, Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women, Harper and Row, 1969; Dana Densmore, "Sex Roles and Female Oppression," Naomi Weisstein, "Woman as Nigger," in The American Sisterhood, Wendy Martin, ed., Harper and Row, 1972.

7. Shirley Chisholm, "The 51% Minority," in The American Sisterhood.

8. Lee Israeil, "Helen Gahagan Douglas," Ms, October, 1973, pp. 55, ff.

9. Brenda Hancock, "Affirmation by Negation in the Women's Liberation Movement," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58 (October, 1972), 264-271; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 59 (February, 1973), 74-86.

10. Ti-Grace Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, Links Books, 1974.

11. in The American Sisterhood.

12. Loretta Blahna, "A Survey of the Research on Sex Differences in Nonverbal Communication," Siscom 75 Women's (and Men's) Communication, SCA, 1975. Sally McConnell-Ginet, "Intonation in a Man's World," Signs 3, (Spring, 1978), 541-559.

13. Produced by The Foundation for Matriarchy, P.O. Box 271, Pratt Station, Brooklyn, New York, 11205. Cost: $300.00 rental for three days; $550.00 for purchase.